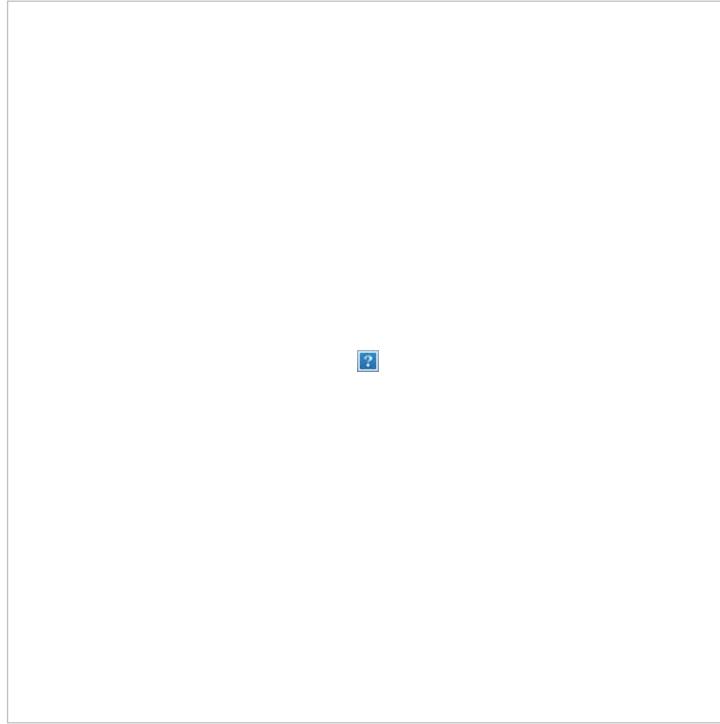

Zinke to review large national monuments created since 1996 'to make sure the people have a voice'

By [Juliet Eilperin](#) April 25 at 9:23 PM

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Heather Swift



The view from Comb Ridge in Utah's Bears Ears National Monument. (Annie Knox/Reuters)

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke said Tuesday evening that President Trump has authorized him to review any national monument created since Jan. 1, 1996 that spans at least 100,000 acres "to make sure the people have a voice" in which lands receive the highest level of federal protection.

Trump will sign an executive order authorizing the review Wednesday at the Interior Department, a move that could prompt changes to areas designated not only by former president Barack Obama but also George W. Bush and Bill Clinton. Each created multiple monuments under the 1906 Antiquities Act, which gives the president wide latitude to safeguard federal land that faces threats.

"It restores the trust between local communities and Washington,"

Zinke told reporters, adding that the point of the sweeping review is “to give Americans a voice and make sure their voices are heard.”

The secretary praised the Antiquities Act but suggested that some of Trump’s predecessors had stretched its meaning in recent years to put “millions of acres” of land and sea off limits to development. “By and large, the Antiquities Act and the monuments that we’ve protected have done a great service to the public,” he said, although citizens in western states “would probably say it’s abused. My position is, I’m going to be looking into it and evaluating it on a legal basis.”

While Zinke did not identify which designations the administration considers the most problematic, the review has been specifically crafted to encompass national monuments in Utah: Grand Staircase-Escalante, which Clinton declared in 1996, and Bears Ears, which Obama declared last December.

Zinke said he would make a specific recommendation within 45 days on what to do about Bears Ears, which enjoys support from a broad coalition of tribes and environmentalists but is opposed by every elected GOP official in the state. He will issue a final report within 120 days of the order’s signing.

While the order will not rescind any national monuments at the outset, it is sure to spark an intense political and legal battle.

Outdoor Industry Association Executive Director Amy Roberts, whose group pulled its major trade show out of Utah in protest of the state government’s opposition to the establishment of the Bears Ears National Monument, said in an interview Tuesday that her members were “concerned” about any effort to alter existing monuments.

“We will participate in that process and make the argument for why these monuments have supported local communities and their economic vitality,” said Roberts, whose group hosted Zinke at an event Tuesday at the National Press Club.

Grand Staircase Escalante Partners Executive Director Nicole Croft, whose group represents local businesses and other supporters of that monument, said the tourists who have come to visit since it was established have spurred much broader economic growth in the area. “Tourism is the anchor of the economy. But we now have a dentist in town,” Croft said. “We’ve got a building boom and a labor shortage.”

But Ethan Lane, executive director of the Public Lands Council at the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, said it was time for the administration to scrutinize how the Antiquities Act had been applied and "update" the law itself. He noted that the number of grazing permits at Grand Staircase-Escalante had declined steeply over the past two decades, despite the fact that the designation specifically allowed for grazing to continue.

"We're not against protecting the resource," Lane said, but added that when it came to the 1906 law, "using it as a multimillion-acres land management tool is not appropriate."

Zinke said he would not "predispose what the outcome is going to be" with any individual monument. He noted that the review would also examine major marine areas Bush and Obama put off limits, including one off the Hawaiian coast.

Christy Goldfuss, who headed the White House Council on Environmental Quality at the end of Obama's second term, said in an interview that she expects the new administration will have difficulty altering the boundaries of existing monuments.

"The reason that I think this review is a legal and moral minefield is that the Obama administration took extensive pains to include local communities in the process for every single designation," said Goldfuss, who is now vice president for energy and environment policy at the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank.